THE END OF ELFIN TOWN

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Joan
In love -
Nov 1893

THE END OF ELFINTOWN

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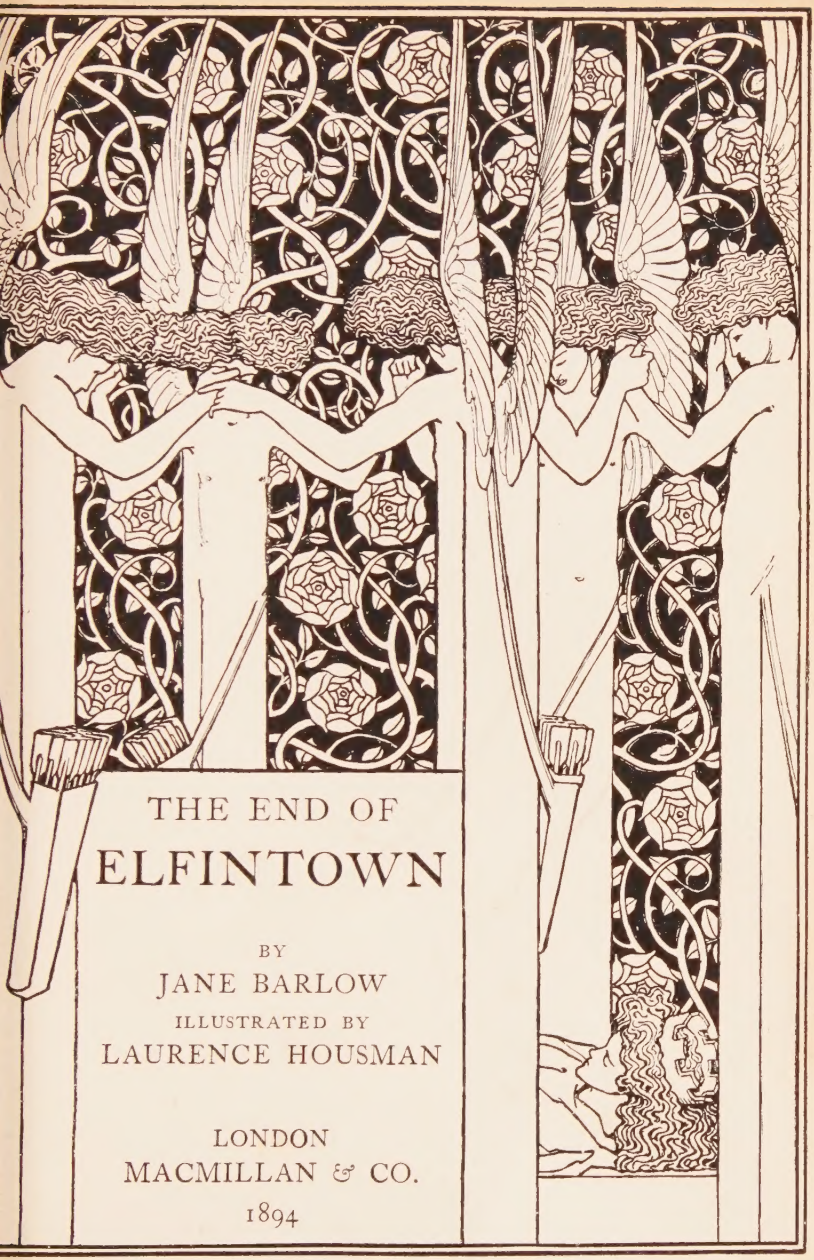

THE END OF ELFINTOWN

BY

JANE BARLOW

ILLUSTRATED BY

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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1894

I.—THE BUILDING

Now would that he who knew so well
Of fierce Pigwiggin's armour fell,
And angered Oberon's wrath, to tell,
And how their feud was ended,

Yea,

Yea, would that he, ere hence he sped,
Had writ in gold, as I in lead,
For men to learn why Fays be fled,
And whitherward they wended.

It hapt in ages far agone
A harmful spell was cast upon
That Elfin King, great Oberon,
And teen and trouble brought him ;
And albeit none can track the skill
That wove the charm full-fraught with ill,
We wot the Bad Brown Witch's will
Such perilous mischief wrought him.

For she by magic showed him clear,
In mirroring crystal of her mere,
A wondrous Town ; 'twas many a year
Ere

Ere yet its like were builded ;
But thro' her might of gramarie
She made the Elfin Prince to see
The grandest that on earth should be,
And most by wealth-wand gilded.

'Twas shrunk, I trow, to seemly size
For straiter range of Elfin eyes,
But else it had its mortal guise,
No sight, no stir omitted,
With tower and temple, and mart and street,
And prison and palace, all complete,
And whirr of wheels, and hurry of feet
That hither thither flitted.

Whereon the King much-marvelling gazed,

Admiring

Admiring more, and more amazed,
Till, when the Witch its image razed,
Still in his heart it tarried,
(A secret that he might not tell),
And home unto his woodland dell
That city's vision, like a spell,
O'er all his thoughts he carried.

And since that day he dwelled no more
In joyance blithe as theretofore,
But sadly aye himself he bore
Amid the sunniest shining ;
Nor quivering beam, nor fluttering breeze,
Nor flickering shade, his sense could please ;
He dreamed of rarer things than these,
And for their lack was pining.

From

From harebell's tent to bindweed's hall,
From cup-moss low to foxglove tall,
He shifted oft his couch withal,
Yet still would chide his chamber,
And said the glowworm-lamps burned dim,
And slurred the dew at rose-bud's rim ;
The kingcup's gold looked dull to him,
And cowslip's gawds of amber.

Hence, on his discontents to brood,
He sat one eve in sorry mood,
While whispering Elves around him stood,
And said 'twas strange, 'twas pity ;
When, sudden, light as leaf on spray,
He leaped and laughed : "By Flowers o' May,
Mine Elves," quoth he, "our own essay
Shall

Shall build as fair a city."

And eagerly at morrow's light
He hasted forth to choose a site,
Whereon should now be reared aright
Strong walls and storeys stately.
He found it soon : an earth-plot bare
Beyond an elm's droop ; six yards square ;
No sod, no moss, no weed, throve there,
Which pleased King Oberon greatly.

"For thro' those streets," said he, "was seen
No blade of grass, or glint of green,
But pavements ferly smooth and clean ;
Small fear of footsteps tripping."
Not far away a brook bobbed by :

"From

"From thence," he said, "we may supply
Our waterworks ; and soothly I
Grow weary of dew-drop sipping."

Then hied him home amain, and shook
His drowsy Fays from every nook,
And bade them follow with him, and look
Where splendour should be springing ;
And ere the earliest star blinked down
Upon that earth-patch bare and brown,
The first white pebble of Elfintown
He laid 'mid cheers loud-ringing.

And now, indeed, industrious days
Be risen upon the land of Fays,
Where every liege his Lord obeys,

And

And toils beside his neighbour.
They plied them late, they plied them soon,
In dew of dawn, thro' drowth of noon,
Nay, oft the wan light of a moon
Swam in to lamp their labour.

No more round Faery-ring they swept
In mazy measures ere they slept ;
But, silent, to his lair each crept,
Limb wearied, sinews aching.
No more they couched in campion's cell,
Or slumbered soft in lily-bell ;
Prone on the ground they flung pell-mell,
Brief rest from task-work taking.

Some kneaded stubborn clay for bricks,
With

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With shells' jagged splints some sawed at
sticks,
Some delved the soil with brier-thorn picks
To helves of flax-haulm fitted ;
On business more than one can name
From dawn to dusk they went and came ;
None durst his share refuse for shame,
Nor would with sloth be twitted.

And brutish things, that creep and crawl
Stingless and strong, they did enthrall
To burdens bear, and pull and haul,
Along the highways goaded ;
There might ye see the Beetle black
Come lumbering down the dusty track,
With pebble-blocks piled on his back,
Or mossy twig-beams loaded.

And

And oft they ponderous weights would heap
On slow-paced Slugs, who, half-asleep,
For many a tedious yard must creep,
Their drivers by them trudging ;
Even nimbler Ants they made submit
To bridle and curb of cobweb knit,
Unruly teams, that plunged and bit,
Against the yoke sore grudging.

Thus, sped by toil of serf and Fay,
The work lagged nowise ; day by day
New mansions rose in rich array
Beside the paven causey ;
Their like was ne'er in Elfland known,
Some built of brick, and some of stone,
And roofed with mica slabs that shone,

And

And glazed with gnat-wings gauzy.

But, fairest amongst all these descried,
Stood in the middle edified
The Palace where the King should bide,
Well worthy a royal master;
Of whitest graile its walls, or stained
With delicate streaks like marble veined,
From brook-bank quarries drawn, fine-grained,
And pure as alabaster.

I dare not say how many a line
It towered aloft, nor words are mine
To tell what fancies Faery-fine
Did hall and chamber garnish,
All carpeted with hand-spun moss,
Or laurel-leaf tight strained across,

That

That flooring made of smoother gloss
Than e'er had wax or varnish.

With couch, and stool, and cushion strown
Of ash-bud's silk or thistle's down ;
Their rugs, fluffed fells of field-mice brown,
For tiger's skin and panther's.
Their curtains came from spider-looms,
Their walls were hung with moths' soft plumes ;
Much gold-dust glittered thro' the rooms,
From stamens brushed and anthers.

A midge-flight from the Palace gate,
(Scroll-work of skeleton beech-leaf) straight
A Fane they reared that matched in state
Famed

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Famed Athens or Eleusis ;
Such beauty frieze and cornice lent,
Entablature and pediment ;
In double row tall columns went
Around it, as their use is.

Each from one slab of rush's pith
Hewn, like majestic monolith,
The architrave to prop, therewith
The massy roof upholding.
Indoors 'twas all adusk and chill ;
No Fay but felt a solemn thrill
To pace its cloistered twilight still
Mysterious glooms enfolding.

Then from the brook with trenching spade
Smooth

Smooth dandelion tubes they laid,
And hemlock pipes that bitter made
The water thro' them tasted ;
Hence, some fastidious Fays would go
With acorn barrels to and fro,
Till this the King forbade, lest so
Their labour seem but wasted.

Herein alone his fortune frowned :
That in all Fayland was not found
The fire-snake, lured from underground
As even-dusk grows dimmer ;
This lacked, they did for lamp-posts choose
Stout daisy-stems, and glowworms use,
Chained there all night with knot and noose,
To make a goodly glimmer.

But

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But who so fain as Oberon,
That watched as every morn outshone
His peerless city waxing on,
While in its growth he gloried?
Triumphant joy it gave the King
To see each straw-plank scaffolding
Pulled down piecemeal, as walls upspring,
Wide-windowed, many-storied.

And ever his stirring Elves amid
He walked, and spied on all they did,
And toilers praised, and idlers chid,
With earnest speech and eager;
Till, swift as blades in April-time
Thro' clod-cracks pricked, did skyward climb
Roof crowding roof; whereof my rime
Keeps but a record meagre.

And

And now ye might, in sooth, have thought,
Seeing all to such perfection wrought,
That Fays might well repose have sought,
From toil returned to pleasure.
Howbeit, not so their King inclined,
For fast as sped the works designed,
Fresh plans were shapen in his mind,
That wist not bound or measure.

Oft as from Palace towers he eyed
That spacious plain, as oft he sighed
To see it planted far and wide
With street-rows thick as stubble.
Nor seldom flaws of wind and rain,
Uplifting roof, and shattering pane,
That needs must be restored again,

Did

Did Elfin labours double.

Thus, by the malice of the skies,
And tasks their King would still devise,
The Fays beheld new toils arise
To bar their hope of resting ;
As he who from the strand hath swum,
While in his ear the surges hum,
Sees evermore to meet him come
White flocks of billows cresting.

Which when at last they clearly knew,
Deep discontent upon them grew,
Till scarce a Fay did timber hew,
Or piled up clay or pebble,
Or hoisted load with strain and heft,
Or grained a door with fingers deft

And

And listless thoughts, but, hope-bereft,
At heart was half a rebel.

II.—THE COUNCIL

So, after setting of a sun,

When all their day's long coil was done,

And dew on gossamer-threads late-spun

Beneath

Beneath the moonbeams trembled,
Called to a chosen meeting-place,
Without the Town a frog-leap's space,
To talk about their evil case
The Elfin folk assembled.

'Twas in good sooth a sight forlorn
To see them fagged and labour-worn,
Their dainty garments stained and torn,
Forms bowed with weary stooping;
Most like a bed of windflowers frail,
What time a shower of pelting hail
Hath smirched with mould the petals pale
And left the bruised stalks drooping.

And as when ruffling breeze-wafts go,
Now sighing loud, now moaning low,

Among

Among the shivering blossoms, so
Among the Elves upstarted
A wail of voices small and shrill,
That swelled and sank commingled, still
Lamenting o'er their present ill
Or ancient bliss departed.

First Elfrain, for his silvern tongue
Renowned his Faery feres among,
Upon a fallen beech-nut sprung,
Spake clear, while hushed they hearkened:
"It little needs, ye Elves" (he said),
"To bid you 'ware the direful dread,
By gathering glooms and shadows spread,
Wherewith our days are darkened.

"But, since a shadow's curse is e'er

The

The eyes to blind and feet to snare,
That else a path would find and fare
From forth its grim embrasure,
Behoves us seek from whence they flit,
These shades that on our lives have lit,
For so, perchance, a way we hit,
Back to the beamy azure.

"Then, prithee, freeborn Fays and Elves,
Here let us pause and ask ourselves
Why this one hews, why that one delves,
Finch waking, chafer whirring.
What graceless freak of spiteful change
Hath o'er us wound these fetters strange,
Who wont down all the dells to range
Unchecked as breeze's stirring?

"What

"What joy have ye to cleave the clod,
Or mortar bear in chickpea hod,
Or down the creaking cart-track plod,
Or up the ladder dizzy?
Nay, daubed with clay, and grimed with dust,
This piteous plight declares ye must
Lament the charge upon you thrust
That makes you bondslaves busy.

"Where now be flown the mirthful hours
Ye fleeted by in blossomy bowers?
Soft sleep at core of scented flowers,
Gay sports on greensward airy?
Why fail your feasts, why flag your flights,
Your morrice-dance on moonlit nights?
Have these things now no more delights

For

For heart of woodland Faery?

"But if one saith: 'The King commands
This irksome service at our hands,
And Oberon's will no Fay withstands,
Lest traitorous act accuse him'—
To such: The ancient laws (I say),
Thro' which our monarch holds his sway,
Point duly where we must obey,
And where, unblamed, refuse him.

"Since for this cause we crowned his head:
That long as Elfin sports be sped,
He still should rule the maze we tread,
When every Faery traces
On dew-sprent turf the emerald ring;
Even as the planet lamps that swing

In

In shimmering cirques around *their* King,
Far up heaven's star-strown spaces.

"Hence, if for us he prove indeed
No sun-bright orb our step to lead,
But Jack-o'-lantern's goblin glede,
That traveller's foot betrayeth,
Shall we our lightsome paths forsake
Thro' bogs to err and briery brake,
Where thorn-pricks thrust and quagmires quake,
Lured as his false gleam playeth?

"Yea, of the King I ask: To thee
Were given for lieges Faeries free,
Or creeping things whose toil we see
By niggard Nature spurred on?

They

They twist the thread, they store the grain,
And thus, at least, their portion gain ;
Whilst us thou biddest to struggles vain.
That win nor gift nor guerdon.

"Yet, furthermore, and haply first
In import grave : some spell accurst,
Methinks, this troublous toiler's-thirst
Thus in our King sets burning ;
For I long since have deemed to mark
Flash from his eye a fitful spark,
Enkindled by those sorceries dark
That steal the wits' discerning.

"How else should he, who erst had known
Fair mansions in fresh flower-buds blown,
His dwelling choose of stock and stone,
Coarse

Coarse clay, and cobweb flimsy ?
Yon piles uncouth, whereon we have wrought
Thro' weary workdays, seem they aught
Save folly planned by one distraught
With some fantastic whimsy ?

"Now, by the Night-bat's shriek ! full loth
Were I to slight my deep-sworn oath,
Or hear it said that I for sloth
Mine owed allegiance scanted ;
But, tho' I bide such slanders ill,
I less could brook the Fay-folk still
Enslaved to work the warlock's will
Who hath our King enchanted."

Thus he ; and thro' his hearers went
Deep murmurs, as when hearts assent

To

To words that voice their discontent,
Long felt but lowly muttered.
And Elfdore from among them next
Arose, his gentle spirit vext,
And much with jarring griefs perplext,
As mournful speech he uttered :

" Ay me, what stinging thoughts awoke
Like ray-warmed flies, while Elfrain spoke,
And told the wrongs of Faery-folk,
And sorer ills that threat them ;
And, keenlier thrilling, called to mind
Those days ere yet our bliss declined—
Lost days, tho' far they lag behind,
What Elf can once forget them ?

" Your heaviest task to plot some prank,
Your

Your dullest hour blithe pastimes shrank ;
With sun that rose, and sun that sank,
No Faery's gladness vanished.
But very vainly lend I speech
To loud-voiced woes ; this truth can teach,
In few, what dismal tracts we reach,
From former weal far-banished :

" That, when our green-ywimpled wood,
Like moss-rose reddening thro' her hood,
Lets vermeil dawn a path make good
Where many a dim shade drowseth,
No more, as once, its burgeoning light
Seems flower-soft balm to Elfin sight,
But signal-fire that weary wight
To loathëd labour rouseth.

" And

"And when the West's curved crystalline
Pales, over-brimmed with silvern shine,
Pure water poured where blush-tinct wine
The rubied rim was crowning,
Naught heeding save our hardship's case,
We only sigh: 'Ebb, light, apace,
And leave our cares a little space
In dreamless slumber drowning.'

"Then, since, of Elfin frolic stripped,
In slavish bonds our days are clipped,
Scarce save in sleep-whelmed pauses slipped,
Blank silence, whither fleeing
From senses' dole to senses' dearth
We respite seek—holds life its worth?
What joy were minished on the earth
If Faeries ceased from being?

"And

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"And not on you alone this yoke
Of bondage falls; an humbler folk
May rue the hour when trowel's stroke
First tinkled clinking yonder;
Our fellow-wights of feature quaint,
Now captived, maugre plea and plaint,
To drudge for us; whose harsh constraint
I oft remorseful ponder.

"My heart grows hot when yearnings vain
Dumb in the draught-ant's eyes speak plain,
For comrades' blithesome bustle fain,
Amid their garnered treasure.
And ruth and wrath will thro' me throb
To hear the unsightly Spider sob,
When from her loom the weft we rob,
Wove with such pride and pleasure.

"And

"And still when harnessed Snail or Slug
I watch the hated wain-load tug,
Or Beetle gross down ruts deep-dug
Hath past me, panting, lumbered,
Reproachful twinges wring my mind,
For so we twofold burdens bind
On creatures whom, thro' Fate unkind,
Unwieldy frames have cumbered.

"Yet, if, irate at wrongs of these,
To rebel thoughts I turn for ease,
I fare as foot that nettle flees,
But which barbed thistle lameth ;
So shrewd a thorn-pang pierced my breast
What time I heard an Elf suggest
That Fays should scorn their King's behest
Since overmuch he claimeth.

"For,

"For, tho' mine ire mount ne'er so high,
Let Oberon but anon draw nigh
With joyful mien and sparkling eye,
Our bootless tasks admiring,
And, doubting naught of hearers glad,
Begin to tell new projects mad—
Tall towers to raise, long rows to add,
All Elfland's strength requiring,

"Then, wistful, pause my face to scan
And read approval of his plan
Trow, if for very ruth I can
There brook him vainly seek it.
Nay, if I knew one word whose might
Could all his hopes forbid and blight,
Loose Elfdom's chains, and crush his sprite,
In truth 'twere hard to speak it.

"But

"But for the cause that Elfrain deems
Hath crazed the King with waking dreams,
A Wizard, who our ruin schemes
With arts beyond our foiling ;
So fell a thought I dare not think
That leadeth to a misery's brink,
Wherefrom my frighted fancies shrink
In anguish back recoiling.

"Our case my counsel mocks. I rede
We Elfmel call, and straitly heed
The word he speaks ; for if, indeed,
Dark Fate, a cure thou shroudest,
His wisdom shall that cure surprise."
Then all around rang eager cries :
"Let Elfmel speak—let him advise"—
And he, at clamour's loudest,

Stood

Stood forth upon the beechen stage ;
Not old, for Faeries know not age,
But past his peers reputed sage,
Such fame his wit achieveth ;
True to the mark his winged words went,
Sure as a well-poised arrow sent,
Yet clear to show their thought's intent
As air that arrow cleaveth :

" Lo, Elfrain's guess, and Elfdore's dread,
I long have known for truth " (he said) ;
" No mortal guile the snare hath spread
Where Oberon lies entangled ;
Nor lives who thus awry could twitch
His sense, or fool to such a pitch,
Save one alone, the Bad Brown Witch.
Aye plotting ills new-fangled.

" And,

"And, wot ye well, if aught avail
To countercharm her magic's bale,
Whose mischief sore we so bewail,
Plunged in this dire quandáry,
'Tis aid no mortal power can lend;
One only may her marring mend—
The Good Gray Witch, a faithful friend
Oft proved to folk of Faery.

"Yet, he who would her pity awake,
A perilous path must undertake,
For far beside her Lonesome Lake
A slumbrous trance hath bound her,
Where evermore a silence deep,
Like trusty sentinel, must keep
Mute watch to guard the sevenfold sleep
That laps its dreams around her.

"The

"The first fold shade or shine ne'er crossed ;
Beyond the next each sound fails lost ;
The third fends off both fire and frost,
How fierce so e'er their noyance ;
The fourth shrouds safe from fear and fret ;
The fifth bars memory and regret ;
Keen ire and scorn the sixth can let,
The seventh all hope and joyance.

"Still may her helpful might be sought,
Still may her ruthful heart be raught,
Albeit by steps with peril fraught,
Down dim paths danger-ridden ;
Yea, long-conned mage-lore yields me arms
Can pierce her sleep ; right awesome charms,
That, save for cure of grievous harms,
To utter I am forbidden.

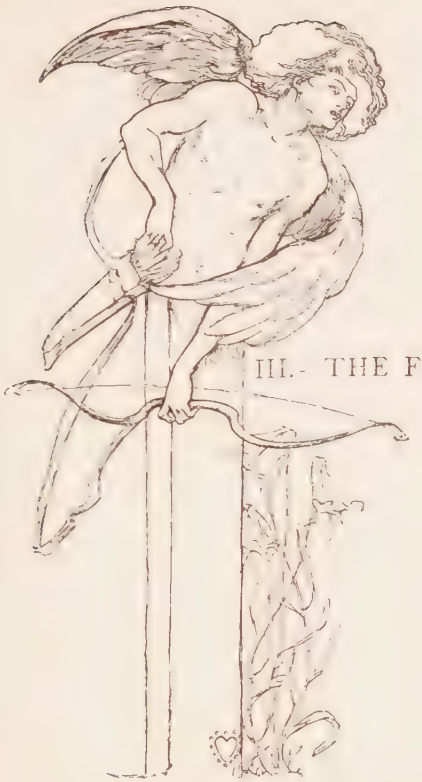
"And

"And erst deemed I that haply soon,
As film-flakes floating by the moon
Steeped in her frosted fire-flood swoon,
And one brief moment dim it,
Even so from us our cares might drift
Fleeting and fading soft and swift;
But nay; their pall shows never a rift,
Their shade-sweep never a limit.

"And therefore now, ye Fays, I feel
'Tis time to her we make appeal
For help that Oberon's hurt shall heal,
And lure him from his madness;
And list ye on this mission trust
My zeal and truth, her power august
Will I beseech, till yield it must
A boon to work us gladness."

Then,

Then, like the hum as poised bee swoops
To gold-domed gloom where flower-bell droops,
The voice of clustering Elfin groups
Rose up, his speech approving;
And cried that in such embassage
No worthier Elf could e'er engage;
And bade him speed the task whose wage
Should be their woe's removing.



III.- THE FLITTING

HENCE, when the dawn looked dewiest,
Forth Elfmel fared on fateful quest,
Alone, so ran the charm's behest,
While

While still the King lay dreaming ;
But—since his se'ennight's peril dared
Were long to tell—he home repaired
When Elfintown at sunset flared,
With roofs and windows gleaming.

He came, in sooth, at time of need,
Because the King had just decreed
A task that should all tasks exceed
Which yet the Fays had sighed o'er :
A monstrous tower, ne'er seen its like,
Whose crest should seem the clouds to strike,
And even the loftiest plantain-spike
Peer in prodigious pride o'er.

Not empty-handed Elfmel came :
A mirror wan in dark-wove frame

The

The Witch had sent, and o'er the same
Breathed many a murmur mystic ;
In size it matched the rain-drop pearled
At broadest blade-point ; round it curled
Stag-beetle's antler, carved and whirled
With sentence Kabalistic.

The which, if hung ere fall of night
Near Oberon's couch, by subtle sleight
Of maker's craft, and magic's might,
Would show him such a vision
As must his frenzy scare away :
"Ay, stranger secrets 'twill bewray,"
Quoth she ; yet more she would not say,
But sped the Elf on his mission.

This Elfmel did anon relate

To

To his comrades, met in grave debate,
Who joyed to learn their evil estate
Might now eftsoons be mended.
And twain in haste by secret stair
To Oberon's bower the mirror bare,
What time he bode all unaware
Of aught his Elves intended.

Methinks when dimness round them closed,
The weariest Fay but seldom dozed,
For new-blown glee with morn-flush rosed
The drift of night's pale lily ;
Or hope and fear, like boisterous breeze
Whereon the fluttering petal flees,
Frayed sleep, that loves on hearts at ease
To light and linger stilly.

Some

Some soft as drowsy finches sung :
"Oh sweet, ye Fays, our lawns among
To fleet fair days, from dawn's flame sprung
Till night star-bright," they twittered ;
While others kept a mien more grave,
For somewhat still their minds misgave
That care so blithe an end should have
Which long their lives embittered.

But all, thro' hopes and fears, watched fain
To see red light the east distain,
That Oberon should rouse again
From slumbers gramarie-haunted ;
For then they must behold a sign
If verily to that spell benign
The Bad Brown Witch's power malign
Had yielded, quelled and daunted.

And

And 'mid the mists of morning-tide
Thronged to the Palace court they hied ;
And, lo, the massy door flung wide,
And Oberon thro' it pacing.
Sad was his look, as if he grieved
Of long-deluding hope bereaved,
Or fairest myth, too much believed,
Truth-touched with finger effacing.

Forth paced he to as mute a hush
As falls upon the twittering bush
Whence titmice watch the missel-thrush,
Their motley tyrant, coming ;
For never a Fay durst move, in fear
Lest haply so should fail his ear
The words he held his breath to hear
Above his heart's thick drumming.

Nor

Nor any sound from earth or sky
That silence flawed, save if thereby
A restive Earwig, stalled anigh,
Stamped foot and tugged at tether ;
Or shrilled a sharper note than that
Where overhead a gaunt-limbed Gnat,
Perched on a neighbouring roof-ridge, sat
And twirled lean legs together.

"Strange tidings unto you I bring,
My faithful Fays," so spake the King
"For in this night a wondrous thing
Was shown me as I slumbered ;
A wondrous thing and piteous both,
For against itself my heart grows wroth
To think how I have abused your troth,
And worked you woes unnumbered.

"Yea,

"Yea, bitter 'tis, since now my brain
No longer reels thro' sorcery's bane,
To trace these tracks of labour vain,
This witless work to gaze on;
Yon cumbrous heaps of stones and stocks
Seem filled for me with flouts and mocks,
As if all round on boards and blocks
I read my folly's blazon.

"Yet bitterer far to feel the while
That every huge-erected pile
Rose inch by inch with drudgery vile
From Elfin race exacted.
And who your freedom's traitorous thief?
Ah, who but I, your chosen chief?
Nay, think not I, but frenzy brief
Of mind with charms distracted.

"And

"And now the night-sent sign, that snaps
This witch-knot black, the mist unwraps
Wherein Fate hid our future haps,
And me its portent teacheth
'Tis fit that yet one further task
I of your tried allegiance ask—
I truly; 'tis no warlock's mask
That here your aid beseecheth:

"I charge you that forthright ye haste
To lay this cursëd city waste;
Let wall be breached, and site erased,
Pluck down both roof and rafter;
Leave not a stone on stone to stand;
Ne'er shall your monarch, by this hand!
Of Faery folk such toils demand

In

In all the ages after."

Thereat uprose a jubilant shout
From all who hearkened round about,
For so they knew beyond a doubt
King Oberon's craze departed.
"Swift be the King's command obeyed,
Then hence" (they cried), "to greenwood glade,
Where Elves, as liked them best estrayed,
Whilom have ranged light-hearted."

But Oberon, still of mien deject,
Their strain exultant heard and checked
With lifted palm and pale aspect,
That motioned silence thro' them.

"Not

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"Not so," spake he in accents grave,
"No more for us the deep woods wave,
Tho' dear the home their greenery gave,
Tho' long our hearts may rue them ;

"Tho' fain were I, if this might be,
Down yon cool shades all care to flee,
And very fain would watch your glee
Wax as in good days golden—
For, lo, the dream, whose power undid
That ill witch-charm, a secret hid,
Which hath, while fouler harm it rid,
So fair a hope withholden.

"Mark well, ye Fays: In years long fled,

When

When Earthland first felt Elfin tread—
But whence, or how, or why we sped,
I wot our wisest knows not—
The Fate who did our journeyings guide
Ne'er destined that, whate'er betide,
This ball must aye our dwelling bide,
A prison whose doors unclose not.

"That weird-night's vision warns me so—
Had meshed us soon in webs of woe,
Whence Fate hath willed we free should go,
Long since to me confiding
The word whereby, if need befal,
Aërial chariots I may call,
Mage-fashioned, meet to waft us all
Up ways heaven's vault dividing.

"Yet

"Yet here so long, so blithe, we dwelled,
So dear our haunts by flood and feld,
That evermore I hoped and held
Such word need ne'er be spoken,
Now from me wrung by darkening doom,
As menace-murk of thunder-gloom
Bids shun hurled bolt and bellowing boom
Ere yet the storm hath broken.

"No plainer speech my lips dare frame;
But, soothly, had ye seen the same,
Each idle moment would ye blame
That us from flight doth sever,
Not loitering o'er what rests to do
Ere hence we float up yonder blue,
Self-exiled from the paths we knew—
For ever and for ever."

I

I trow that every Fay who heard
Was grieved at heart by Oberon's word,
Yet none lamented, none demurred,
Or against his will besought him ;
For in his steadfast-mournful eyne
They could some fatal truth divine,
Tho' none might know what boding sign
To stern resolve had wrought him.

And 'tis a riddle still ungues't
What vision from that mirror's breast
Was flashed athwart King Oberon's rest,
So filled with fear and wonder.
Some say that unto him were shown
Days when round earth, once green and lone,
Shall whirl with cities all o'ergrown,
No Elf-ring's circle asunder ;

And

And say he saw or ever he woke
High heaven blurred out with riftless smoke,
Where men ground down 'neath labour's yoke
Toil to the mad wheel's thunder ;
World weeded o'er from prime to prime
With want, and woe, and care, and crime,
Unmeet to tell in Faery rime,
That halts such burden under.

Howbeit, the Elves in eager crowd
Made haste to raze those mansions proud ;
Anon the rill-cliffs echoed loud
To crash of timbers falling,
As toppling towers at onslaught rude
Reeled down in wrack, and street-rows strewed
Their

Their swift-wrought ruin, whence captives shrewd
Slipped homeward, warily crawling.

Till soon, if wanderer chanced to fare
Across that earth-patch smooth and bare,
He spied no Elfin doings there,
And only heard a rustle
Where shrivelled leaves their serest brown
Thro' Autumn mists had drifted down.
This was the end of Elfintown,
Built with such coil and bustle.

Then Oberon spake the word of might
That set the enchanted cars in sight;
But lore I lack to tell aright
Where

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Where these had waited hidden.
Perchance the clear airs round us rolled
In secret cells did them enfold,
Like evening dew that none behold
Till to the sward 'tis slidden.

And who can say what wizardise
Had fashioned them in marvellous wise,
And given them power to stoop and rise
More high than thought hath travelled?
Somewhat of cloud their frames consist,
But more of meteor's luminous mist,
All girt with strands of seven-hued twist
From rainbow's verge unravelled.

'Tis said, and I believe it well,
That whoso mounts their magic sell,
Goes,

Goes, if he list, invisible
Beneath the broadest noonlight;
That virtue comes of Faery-fern,
Lone-lived where hill-slopes starward turn
Thro' frore night hours that bid it burn
Flame-fronded in the moonlight;

For this holds true—too true, alas!—
The sky that eve was clear as glass,
Yet no man saw the Faeries pass
Where azure pathways glisten;
And true it is—too true, ay me—
That nevermore on lawn or lea
Shall mortal man a Faery see,
Tho' long he look and listen.

Only the twilit woods among

A wild-winged breeze hath sometimes flung
Dim echoes borne from strains soft-sung
Beyond sky-reaches hollow ;
Still further, fainter up the height,
Receding past the deep-zoned night—
Far chant of Fays who lead that flight,
Faint call of Fays who follow :

(*Fays following.*) Red-rose mists o'erdrift
Moth-moon's glimmering white,
Lit by sheen-silled west
Barred with fiery bar ;
Fleeting, following swift,
Whither across the night
Seek we bourne of rest ?

(*Fays leading.*) Afar.

(*Fays*

(*Fays following.*) Vailing crest on crest
Down the shadowy height,
Earth with shores and seas
Dropt, a dwindling gleam.
Dusk, and bowery nest,
Dawn, and dells dew-bright,
What shall bide of these?

(*Fays leading.*) A dream.

(*Fays following.*) Fled, ah fled, our sight.
Yea, but thrills of fire
Throbbed adown yon deep,
Faint and very far
Who shall rede aright?
Say, what wafts us nigher,
Beckoning up the steep?

(*Fays leading.*) A star.

(*Fays*

(*Fays following.*) List, a star! a star!
Oh, our goal of light!
Yet the winged shades sweep,
Yet the void looms vast.
Weary our wild dreams are:
When shall cease our flight
Soft on shores of sleep?
(*Fays leading.*) At last.

THE END OF ELFIN-TOWN